



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF FUNDING FOR THE CONNECTICUT FAIR HOUSING CENTER

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding funding for the Connecticut Fair Housing Center. My name is Erin Kemple. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center (hereinafter "the Center"). The Connecticut Fair Housing Center is a private non-profit dedicated to ensuring that all Connecticut residents have access to the housing of their choice. To accomplish this mission, the Center assists clients by addressing fair housing, fair lending, and homeowner rights through investigating claims of discrimination and the provision of legal representation, working with state and local governments to ensure that they fulfill their obligations under the fair housing laws, promoting integration, and stabilizing neighborhoods through foreclosure prevention.

I would like to begin by thanking the Governor for recommending that the State continue its support of the Center in the FY2015 budget. This Committee approved funding for the Center in the FY2014 biennium budget and the Governor's FY2015 budget continues that funding. Thank you.

Funding for fair housing and fair lending work is critical at this time. In addition to its other work, the Center has been collaborating with the Department of Housing on a report for the US Department of Housing and Urban Development that examines the impediments to fair housing choice in Connecticut. The report will be completed shortly. Some of the information uncovered is both startling and dismaying. For example, two of every three persons of color in Connecticut live in just 15 of the state's 169 municipalities. When considering White-Latino

segregation, Bridgeport ranks as the eighth most segregated, while Hartford ranks as the ninth most segregated in the nation. With regard to White-Black segregation, Bridgeport ranks as the 18th most segregated in the country while Hartford ranks as the 34th most segregated.

Fortunately, the State has moved aggressively to reverse these historic patterns of segregation and supporting funding for the Center is one of the ways that it is doing this.

As a result of funding from the State of Connecticut, the Center was able to accomplish the following:

- Reached more than 10,000 Connecticut residents with the Center's education and outreach materials;
- Worked with more than 2,000 Connecticut residents who believed they were the victim of housing discrimination or were in danger of losing their homes to foreclosure;
- Filed more than 30 new cases in state and federal court as well as at HUD and the CHRO;
- Successfully resolved more than 100 cases by:
 - Preventing families from becoming homeless;
 - Obtaining reasonable accommodations which allowed people with disabilities to obtain housing;
 - Assisting people with disabilities in getting modifications made to their homes;
 - Getting mortgage modifications to keep homes affordable;
 - Obtaining damages for clients whose rights were violated.
- Kept several clients out of state-funded nursing homes and in their own homes in the community;
- Performed fair housing testing to determine if race was an impermissible factor in the decision making of housing providers and found discrimination in more than 80% of the tests performed;
- Reached out to housing developers, community groups, health advocates, town zoning attorneys, federal, state and municipal government officials to discuss how to ensure that people of color in Connecticut have full access to communities with access to jobs, high performing schools, and safe neighborhoods;
- Taught fair housing classes for more than 1,000 Connecticut residents at housing authorities, community and faith based organizations, for landlords, homeless shelters, and nonprofit organizations serving seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities.

In the testimony and fact sheets included in your packets, our clients tell their stories much more eloquently than I can. Crystal Carter, an African-American woman with five children, was homeless when she contacted the Center because she had been denied access to a housing voucher waiting list in a majority white town. Through the Center's advocacy, Crystal got a housing voucher and rented a single-family house for her and her children. Because the family's housing is stable, her children are doing better in school and she was recently featured in a story in the *Hartford Courant* regarding a job she obtained. The testimony of Independence Unlimited, a group that advocates for people with disabilities, reveals that without the Center, many of their clients would not have obtained housing that suited their needs. Finally, read the eloquent testimony of the families in foreclosure who have saved their homes through the help of the Center. The Center was able to help all of these people and many more as a result of State funding.

To ensure that the critical work of the Center continues in the future, we ask that this Committee approve funding of \$500,000 in funding as recommended in the Governor's FY2015 budget.

Thank you for your time and attention.

